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Inventor(s): **Robert P. Burke**For: **ADJUSTABLE FORWARD FEEDING DISPLAY SYSTEM**

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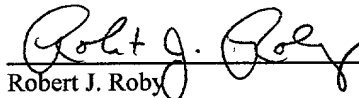
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DISPLAY SYSTEM

Attorney : Robert J. Roby

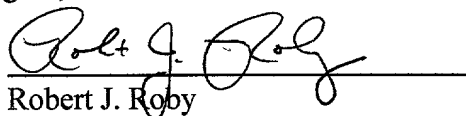
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ADJUSTABLE FORWARD FEEDING DISPLAY SYSTEM**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

5 The present invention generally relates to an adjustable display rack and shelf management system. More specifically, the present invention relates to an adjustable forward feeding display rack for storing and displaying merchandise of a variety of shapes and sizes and automatically delivering the merchandise to the front of the rack in seriatim.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Shelving is used extensively for stocking and storing products or merchandise in a variety of stores. Most stores have immovable shelving which is arranged back-to-back between aisleways. The nature of the fixed shelves makes it difficult to add and remove products. Moreover, such shelves make difficult the rotation of the shelved products, which involves moving the older stock to the front of the shelf and positioning
15 new stock behind the older stock.

In order to devise a means for automatically moving products forward as they are removed, numerous forward feed devices have been devised. These devices fall into three categories. The first category is inclined tracks relying on gravity to feed the product forward. Gravity feeding is unpredictable in that various materials slide faster
20 than others because of different weights and frictional interfaces between the products and the track. The second category tries to overcome these problems by adding conveyor belts which still use gravity to effect forward movement. Of course, such devices are cumbersome, expensive and complicated due to the need to properly tension and track the conveyor belts.

25 The third category uses springs to feed the product forward. The springs result in a simple, inexpensive design which will smoothly move products forward. There have been a number of variations on this type of design.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

30 Many spring-biased devices have the disadvantage that they can only be used for a very limited size of product. In addition, even if designed for variations in size, the designs are complicated and difficult to alter. Moreover, it has been discovered that

most spring biased devices cannot tolerate high loads and that such loads may often disengage the spring-biasing assembly from the display rack.

Accordingly, the present invention involves an adjustable forward feeding display system. The display system is adjustable in a direction transverse to the direction of feeding, meaning the present display system is specifically designed to adjust to compliment containers and packaging having various widths. Moreover, the present display system also involves a simplified assembly process, as well as a stable spring biasing assembly. The present display system also benefits from a stable connection to both the front and rear portions on the display rack, such that the product tracks in and any dividers in-between the product tracks are securely locked to the front and rear of the display rack while still allowing the tracks and dividers to translate transverse to the front and rear of the display rack.

Accordingly, one aspect of the present invention involves a pusher block and track combination. The track generally comprises a pair of collinear substantially T-shaped ridges. The pusher block has two sets of opposing flanges. The opposing flanges attach to the track at more than the top and outside surface of the rail, such that the track is captured by the pusher block with each ridge captured between a corresponding set of opposing flanges.

Another aspect of the present invention involves an adjustable display rack for storing and displaying products in a shelf-like orientation. The display has a frame with a front panel and a back panel. The front panel and the back panel extend generally parallel to one another and are separated by a fixed distance. The front panel and the back panel include races that extend along the front and back panels. The display rack further comprises one or more product tracks having raised rails extending generally transverse to the front and back panels and a removable pusher block slidably attached to the product track. A biasing member biases the pusher block forward, and at least one divider is positioned between two adjacent product tracks. The product tracks and dividers are slidably attached to the races of the front panel and the rear panel and allow for translational movement of the product tracks and dividers.

Yet a further aspect of the present invention involves a pusher block and track combination. The track includes a pair of raised rails having a generally T-shape. The

pusher block has at least two sets of opposing flanges, wherein the opposing flanges attach to one of the rails at more than the top and outside surface of the rail, whereby the rail is captured between the set of opposing flanges, but slides backward and forward on the flanges.

5 A further object of the invention is an adjustable display rack for storing and displaying products in a shelf-like orientation. The rack comprises a frame with a front panel and a back panel extending generally parallel to each other and being a substantially fixed distance relative to one another. The front panel and the back panel include races and corresponding removable pusher block assemblies. The rack further
10 comprises one or more product tracks. The product tracks include raised rails extending generally transverse to the front and back panels and being generally T-shaped. The removable pusher block assembly includes a pusher block slidably attached to the product track. The pusher block comprises two sets of opposing flanges. The flanges are arranged to capture the rails on both side edges of both rails. The pusher block
15 assembly also has a biasing member urging the pusher block forward along the track. At least one divider is positioned between two adjacent product tracks and the product tracks and dividers are slidably attached to the races to allow movement of the product tracks and dividers from side to side along the front panel and the rear panel.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

20 These and other features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings of a preferred embodiment, which embodiment is intended to illustrate and not to limit the invention, and in which figures:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of an adjustable display rack having various features, aspects and advantages in accordance with the present invention;

25 Figure 2 is a front elevation view of the adjustable display rack of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a top plan view of the display rack of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a sectioned view of the display rack of Figure 1 taken along the line 4-4;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of a portion of the display rack of Figure 1;

30 Figure 6 is a sectioned view of a single product track and block of the display rack of Figure 1 taken through the line 6-6;

Figure 7 is a top plan view of Figure 6; and

Figure 8 is a sectioned view of a product track configured and arranged in accordance with various features, aspects and advantages of the present invention.

Figure 9 is a front view of the pusher block and product track of the present invention.

Figure 10 is a side view of an embodiment in which the product tracks and dividers are snap fit into the front and rear races.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

With reference initially to Figure 1, an adjustable display rack for use as a shelf management system, generally designated by reference numeral 10, is illustrated. The adjustable display rack is configured and arranged to accept packages of various sizes, weights and configurations. For instance, the present adjustable display rack may be commonly used with prepackaged and bagged salads and other types of produce. Additionally, in one embodiment, the present adjustable display rack 10 may have particular utility with pharmaceutical products, such as drugs and vitamins. While the present invention is typically used with comestible products in stores such as grocery stores and convenience marts, the present adjustable display rack may find utility in a variety of other environments, including warehouses, hospital, drug store, and office supply rooms, auto parts stores and clothing stores, for instance, but without limitation.

The present adjustable display rack 10 is generally comprised of a frame 12 and a product supporting and feeding assembly 14. While the illustrated frame 12 may be simply placed upon a shelf or other similar structure, it is contemplated that the frame 12 may be positioned within a slidable drawer not shown, such that the drawer may be pulled out to provide access to the entire frame where the adjustable display racks 10 are oriented in close vertical relationship to one another. Such a slideable mounting assembly will ease the rotation of product positioned within the display rack 10 by allowing the stock person full access to the full dimension of the product supporting and feeding assembly 14.

With continued reference to Figure 1, the frame 12 generally comprises a first and second end. In the preferred embodiment the first and second end are a front panel 20 and a rear panel 22. The panels 20, 22 extend generally parallel to one another at a

substantially fixed distance. With reference now to Figure 4, the panels 20, 22 will be discussed in detail in seriatim beginning with the front panel 20. The front panel 20 generally comprises an inverted F configuration. Specifically, the front panel 20 includes a forward facing channel 24 generally defined by an upper lip 26 and a lower lip 28. The channel 24 is desirably sized and configured to accommodate sku identifiers or other product identification and pricing information to be positioned proximate to products which may be positioned and displayed in the adjustable display rack 10. The front panel 20 also comprises a rearward-facing race 30. The race 30 is generally defined by an upper flange 32 and a lower support surface 34. The race 30 is preferably sized and configured to allow free movement of product tracks and dividers in manners which will be described in greater detail below. With continued reference to Figure 4, a product retaining wall 36 desirably extends upward between the forward-facing channel 24 and the race 30 and preferably angles slightly rearward from a location above the upper lip 26 and the upper flange 32. The product retaining wall 36 serves as a forward-most stopping surface for the adjustable display rack 10 and is desirably angled rearward to help pinch and hold product within the adjustable display rack 10 while the product is being urged forward in manners to be described in greater detail below.

With continued reference to Figure 4, the rear panel 22 is advantageously configured in a simple C shape. As such, the rear panel 22 generally comprises an upper flange 40 and a lower support surface 42. As with the front panel 20, the upper flange 40 and the lower support surface 42 generally define a race 44 within the rear panel 22. The race 44 is preferably sized and configured similar to the race 30. The lower support surface 42, as well as the lower support surface 34, desirably extend at greater length toward one another than the upper flange 32 and the upper flange 40. The greater extension increases the surface contact area between the lower support surfaces 34, 42 and any base structure, such as a shelf or a drawer on which the adjustable display rack 10 rests. In the illustrated configuration, the lower support surfaces 34, 42 each receive a magnetized material which forms an additional layer below the lower support surfaces. This additional layer 46, 48 may extend the entire transverse length (i.e., the length from one end to the other of the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22) or may be segregated into shortened portions serving as feet for the

adjustable display rack 10. In some embodiments, the additional layers 46, 48 may not be necessary, while in other embodiments, the additional layers 46, 48 may comprise rubberized components for shock absorption and the like, as well as Velcro or other suitable securing and supporting components.

5 With reference again to Figures 1-3, the frame 12 of the present adjustable display rack 10 also generally comprises a first and second side. In the preferred embodiment, the first and second side are end pieces 50, 52. The end pieces 50, 52 may be distinct elements or may be portions of the product supporting and feeding assembly 14 which will be discussed in detail below.

10 In the illustrated display rack, the end pieces 50, 52 are distinct elements. With reference to Figures 1 and 5, the left end piece 50 is attached to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 through the use of an end clip 60. The end clip 60 may be attached to the left end piece 50 in any suitable manner. In the illustrated embodiment, the left end piece is formed as a section of track which has a configuration which will be described
15 below. However, the end clip 60 slides into a portion of the track and is allowed to be fixed within the track without the use of any glue or other adhesive material. The end clip will be described in more detail later, but slides into the rails/ridges 72 of the product track 70 and/or the dividing wall 90 at one or both ends.

20 Referring again to the frame, the end piece 50 is preferably attached to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 with a threaded fastener 62 at both the front and the rear panels 20, 22. The left end piece 50 may also be removably attached to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 using any other suitable method, including directly fastening the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 to the end piece 50 such as through the lower support surfaces 34, 42.

25 With continued reference to Figure 1, the right end piece 52 is preferably permanently or semi-permanently fastened to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 such as through rivets 64. It is envisioned, however, that both end panels may be removably fastened to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22, as well as the end pieces 50, 52 being configured such that one is attached permanently or semi-permanently
30 while the other is removably attached. The removability of the end pieces 50, 52 creates a self-contained display rack 10 that may be reconfigured for various size products

quickly and easily by removing one of the end pieces 50, 52 or both of the end pieces 50, 52 and altering the size or lateral dimension of any of the members of the product supporting and feeding assembly 14 which will be described in detail below.

The display rack also comprises a track to underlie a plurality of said products.

5 The track extends longitudinally between first and second ends, and laterally between first and second sides. In the preferred embodiment the track comprises the product track 70. With continued reference to Figure 1, the present product supporting and feeding assembly 14 will be described in greater detail. As illustrated, the present product supporting and feeding assembly 14 generally comprises a number of product

10 tracks and dividers. In some instances, the product tracks and dividers are integrally formed (i.e., formed of a single piece - see Figure 5) and in other instances, the product tracks are separate from the dividers to add increased flexibility to the sizing of the products which may be carried by the product tracks and dividers (See Figures 6 and 7). In most instances, the dividers will include a portion or a segment of product track to

15 allow the divider to also function as a support surface. Moreover, the product tracks and the dividers having support surfaces will use ridges to decrease the contact surface area between the packages and the product supporting and feeding assembly 14 such that friction may be reduced between the products and the assembly 14. With this introduction, the assembly 14 will be described.

20 With reference now to Figure 6, a typical product track 70 arranged and configured in accordance with certain features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will be described in detail. While the illustrated product track 70 is but one configuration for such tracks, it is the presently preferred embodiment. The product track 70 generally comprises a pair of rails or ridges 72 that extend in a collinear fashion

25 substantially the depth of the display rack 10. The rails 72 have a flattened upper surface to slightly increase the support surface area for carrying product. The upper surface, however, is not so large that an increased friction may result such that product cannot be moved under the available forces for the product supporting and feeding assembly 14. The rails 72 further comprise a generally vertically extending rib 74. The

30 rib 74 spaces the rails 72 from a lower support surface 76. As illustrated clearly in Figure 6, the rails, rib and lower support surfaces 72, 74, 76 create a double I cross-

sectional shape. The lower support surface 76 is preferably continuous between the two sets of rails and ribs 72, 74. It should be understood that while the presently preferred product track 70 is a straight extrusion of the plastic material, it is envisioned that the rib or the lower support surface 74, 76 may be intermittent along the length of the rails 72 such that the rib 74 or the lower support surface 76 is not continuous with the entire length of the rails 72. With continued reference to Figure 6, the rails 72 terminate at an inward edge with a sloping tie down surface 78. The tie down surface 78 cooperates with a pusher block or product pusher which reciprocates along the longitude of the product track in manners which will be described in greater detail below.

The tracks are slidably engaged at both ends in a first and second guide lying transverse to the longitudinal extensions of each track. In the preferred embodiment the guides are races 30, 44 and the tracks are product tracks 70. With reference now to Figures 8 and 4, it can be seen that both ends of the product track 70 extend to the races 30, 44 and are captured therein with or without an end clip 60. In this manner, each of the product tracks 70 are generally restrained for translational movement from side to side along the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22. Additionally, this configuration results in a secure connection of the product tracks 70 with the frame 12 such that the product track 70 cannot flop around such as might occur with a track that is only connected at either the front or rear panel 20, 22. The end clip 60 may be attached to the product track 70 in any suitable manner, including friction fitting, threaded fasteners, fasteners, detents, and any other suitable method.

With reference now to Figure 2, two adjacent product tracks 70 are preferably separated by a dividing wall 90 such that product carried by one product track 70 will not interfere with the movement of product carried by an adjacent product track 70. The dividing wall 90 may take on any suitable configuration and in some embodiments, carries the same cross-sectional profile as a product track with the addition of an upward extending wall at one outer edge of the lower support surface 76. In some embodiments, the dividing wall 90 has an L-shaped configuration, while in other embodiments the dividing wall 90 has a T-shaped configuration. It is also possible to configure a dividing wall 90 without a product supporting surface 92. For instance, the dividing wall 90 may be attached to a pair of end clips 60 such that one is positioned at

each end (see Figs 1 and 5). In this configuration, the end clips 60 could attach the dividing wall 90 to the front panel 20 and the rear panel 22 for sliding movement therein. As discussed above, the dividing wall 90 may also be combined with a product track 70 such as that illustrated in Figure 5.

5 With reference to Figure 5, the product track 70 is generally comprised of the same rails, ribs, lower support surface and tie down surfaces 72, 74, 76, 78 as discussed above. However, the lower support surface 76 extends to both sides of the product track 70 and includes a pair of upwardly extending ribs 94 that serve to carry a product. The upwardly extending ribs 94 also decrease friction between the product and the product
10 track 70 by decreasing surface contact area. Additionally, the lower support surface 76 extends outward into a dividing wall 90 at one of the left or right ends. The particular configuration of the product tracks and dividing walls may vary upon application to allow proper sizing of the product supporting and feeding assembly for any specific display rack 10. The product supporting and feeding assembly 14 described thus far advantageously allows a store operator to quickly and easily reconfigure the shelves within the store to accept products of varying sizes and shapes without ordering a complete replacement display rack. Moreover, the versatility of the present adjustable display rack 10 is dramatically increased by the interchangeable nature of the product
15 tracks 70 and dividing walls 90, as well as the combined product tracks/dividing wall described directly above.

20 While it has been disclosed that one end 50, 52 of the frame 12 may be removed to allow the replacement and/or removal or addition of a product track 70 or a dividing wall 90, as shown in figure 10, it is also envisioned that a product track 70 or dividing wall 90 may simply be snap fit into the frame 12 such that the end clips 60 attach the
25 track 70 or dividing wall 90 for sliding movement relative to the frame after being snapped in. Along these lines, the tracks 70 and walls 90 may be configured similar to a ski boot binding wherein the one end of the track 70 or dividing wall 90 is slipped into either the front or rear panel 20, 22 and then snapped into place in the other of the panels 20, 22. In one embodiment, at least a portion of the upper flange 32 may have
30 increased flexibility to allow the end clip 60 to slide into the race 30 more easily.

Additionally or alternatively, the angle on the inside top of the race 32 can be changed to allow this flexibility.

Additionally, the races 30, 44 may include an entrance slot such that product tracks 70 and dividing walls 90 may be inserted and/or removed in various locations along the length of the race 30, 44. Additionally, the product tracks 70 and the dividing walls 90 may be separated by spacer blocks 96 such as those illustrated in Figure 3. The spacer blocks may be arranged and configured in any suitable manner and likewise may be attached to the front panel 20, rear panel 22, or any of the dividers 90 or product tracks 70.

The product pusher comprises a spring which biases the product pusher toward the end of the track and a sliding connection between the track and the product pusher. With reference now to Figures 6-8, the biasing assembly for the forward feeding product supporting and feeding assembly 14 will be described in detail. As illustrated therein, the biasing member is preferably a roll spring 100. The roll spring 100 has characteristics which make it desirable over various other springs, such as compression springs. For instance, the roll spring 100 naturally recoils after being extended and released. The recoiling involves rolling of the coil into its tightly wound initial state. As the roll spring 100 is stretched, the force exerted by the roll spring 100 varies unlike that of coil springs in which the force is approximately the same during such stretching.

Of course, coil springs may be used, however, they are not the presently preferred embodiment. Moreover, elastic straps, ropes, and a variety of other springs and biasing members may be used. However, they are not the presently preferred biasing member for a number of reasons. A roll spring provides a uniform force throughout its extension, is simple to install and doesn't require attachment to the pusher block. The roll spring 100 may be permanently, semi-permanently or removably attached to the product track 70. It is presently preferred, however, that the roll spring 100 be permanently or semi-permanently attached to the product track 70 through the use of a rivet 102. It is envisioned, however, that threaded fasteners, fasteners, pins, connectors and couplings of any suitable type may also be used.

The balance of the roll spring 100 rests on a spring carrying surface 110 of a product pusher or pusher block, indicated generally by the reference numeral 112. Due

to the unique configuration of the roll spring, no permanent attachment or semi-permanent attachment is necessary to maintain the spring's position on the spring carrier surface. Indeed, the forward tension of the roll spring which would be opposed by any product positioned forward of the pusher block 112 would help to maintain the position of the roll spring 100 on the spring carrier surface 110.

With reference now to Figure 8, it may also be seen that the forward portion of the roll spring may be positioned and attached to the forward end clip 60 in any suitable manner. In this way, the pusher block 112 may slide all the way forward to the product retaining wall 36 rather than being artificially stopped by the position of the rivet 102 or other attachment method of the forward end of the roll spring 100. In embodiments such as the one illustrated in Figure 8 in which the pusher block can traverse substantially the entire length of the product track 70, a spacing member 140 may be positioned forward of the pusher block 112 along the product track 70 such that the forward motion of the pusher block 112 may be limited as shown in figure 3. For example, as shown in Figure 3, the paddle 140 can be positioned on the rails/ridges 72 between the product and the front panel 20. In continued reference to Figure 8, the forward portion of the roll spring 100 is bent upward in position resting on the spring carrier surface 110 of the pusher block 112 and held in position by forces exerted between the end clip 60 and the lower support surface 34. This, in effect, captures the end of the roll spring 100 within the end clip. However, the spring is recessed in the end clip such that it is still slidable in the races.

The illustrated product pusher is in sliding connection with the product track. In general, the connection comprises a first and second pair of surfaces, with the first pair located adjacent the first rail or side of the track. One surface of the first and second pairs is on the track and the other surface of each of the first and second pairs is on the product pusher. The first and second pairs of surfaces engage to resist separation of the product pusher from the track. Additionally, there is a third pair of surfaces located between the first rail or side of the track and the second rail or side of the track. One surface of the third pair is on the track and the other surface of the third pair is on the product pusher. The third pair of surfaces engages to resist separation of the product pusher from the track. Preferably, with reference to figures 6 and 9, the first and second

pair of surfaces generally comprise the interaction between the outside flanges 122 of the pusher block 112 and the rails/ridges 72, while the third pair of surfaces generally comprise at least one arm 128 of the middle pusher block flange and another surface of the rails/ridges 78. With reference now to Figures 1 and 6-9, the product pusher or pusher block 112 in the preferred embodiment will be described in further detail. The pusher block 112 generally comprises the spring carrier surface 110, a pushing surface 114, a sliding surface 116, and two sets of opposing flanges 118. As explained, the opposing flanges 118, generally capture the rails or ridges 72 of the product track 70 to maintain a positive lock on the product track 70 by the pusher block 112. As illustrated in Figure 8, the pushing surface 114 extends generally normal to the upper surface of the product track 70. The pushing surface 114 is designed to allow the pusher block 112 to maintain contact with the packaging positioned directly in front of the pusher block 112. The spring carrier surface 110 and the sliding surface 116 are generally formed from the same section of material which extends rearward of the pushing surface 114 along a direction generally perpendicular to the pushing surface 114. In the illustrated embodiment in figures 6 and 7, a pair of gussets 120 support the relationship between the pushing surface 114 and the spring carrier surface 110. The outer edges of the spring carrier surface 110 are rolled downward and inward in the illustrated embodiment. These rolled edges 122 form one of the opposing flanges of each of the two sets of opposing flanges. Along the spring carrier surface 110, proximate the central portion of the spring carrier surface are two ridges 121. These ridges serve to maintain the position of the roll spring 100 on the pusher block 112.

With reference now to Figure 9, as well as Figure 6, the second of the opposing flanges is formed by a generally T-shaped boss 124 which extends downward from the sliding surface 116. The T-shaped boss 124 is designed to slide under the lower-most edge of the tie down surface 78. The T preferably has a pair of chamfers 130 formed along its stem 126. Specifically, the chamfers 130 are formed between the sliding surface 116 and the stem 126 and the stem 126 and the laterally extending arms 128. Through the use of the arms 128 and the rolled edges 122, the two sets of opposing flanges grip each of the rails 72 of the product track 70 to form a positive lock between the product track 70 and the pusher block 112. This positive lock reduces the likelihood

of the pusher block 112 separating from the product track 70 under high load. The chamfers 130 reduce the contact surface area between the product track 70 and the pusher block 112 as well as center a vertical direction the pusher block 112 on the product track 70. Moreover, the bottom edge of the arms 128 serve to direct the roll spring 100 down toward the lower-most surface of the track, as well as serve to provide an idler arm to the roll spring 100 in some embodiments.

Various accessories may be added to the adjustable display rack 10 configured and arranged in accordance with the present invention. For instance, with reference to Figures 6 and 7, an increased size pushing paddle 140 is illustrated therein. The pushing paddle 140 increases the contact surface area between the product being moved forward and the pusher block 112. Specifically, the paddle 140 is arranged with a pair of inwardly extending flanges 142 that are sized and configured to create a channel that slip fits over the pushing surface 114 of the pusher block 112. Moreover, the paddle 140 comprises a pair of ridges 144 that decrease the contact area between the paddle 140 and the pushing surface 114 such that the paddle may be easily removed or positioned on the pushing surface 114 as desired. The paddle 140 can also be used as in figure 3 as a spacing member.

Generally, the adjustable display rack 10 may be comprised of any suitable material. Materials presently preferred are materials from the styrene family or self-lubricating FDA approved plastics, such as, but not limited to, acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene (ABS). In some embodiments, however, the components may be manufactured from stainless steel, UHMW, or other FDA approved materials. The materials are chosen to allow for easy cleaning and reduce adsorption of liquids. In applications not involving food products, the materials may be chosen from any material considered desirable to those of the user. Where materials are not judiciously chosen to result in a self-lubricating nature to the product, materials such as brass or bronze or any other bearing type surface material may be utilized with steels and the like. Additionally, a silicon spray may be used to coat the surfaces to increase the lubrication between the moving components. In some embodiments, the front panel 20 may be opaque, transparent or translucent. In the present and preferred embodiment, the front panel 20

is comprised of a clear plastic material to allow the prospective purchaser a clear line of vision to the product being carried by the adjustable display rack 10.

In use, the display rack is sized and configured using various product tracks 70 and dividers 90 to closely approximate the size of the packaging of the products being carried. It is anticipated that multiple product tracks 70 may be aligned side-by-side to carry heavier products such that a divider need not be placed directly between each and every product track 70. Once the sizing is complete, the frame may be closed in embodiments having a removable end piece 50. The end pieces 50 and 52 may be a product track 70 or a dividing wall 90. With the assembly complete, product may be loaded into the display rack 10 by pulling the pusher block 112 toward the rear panel 22 while stocking the product forward of the pusher block 112. As products are removed from between the pusher block 112 and the front panel 20, the pusher block will be urged forward under the bias of the roll spring 100 until the supply of product is depleted. When restocking, the pusher block 112 is simply slid rearward and the new product is positioned rearward of the old product to ensure a continuous cycling of product.

The ability to slidably move the tracks and dividers, the ability to add and remove tracks and dividers, and the ease with which this is done makes the display rack of the present invention infinitely variable with respect to width of a product.

It will be appreciated that the display rack of the present invention is extremely versatile and can be constructed and configured to display products of varying size and configuration in side by side relation. For example, a mixture of wider and thinner products could be displayed in the same rack by simply varying the width of the product tracks and dividers or adding different sized product tracks and dividers. In addition, products with a wide variety of heights can be displayed by varying the height of the front panel, or varying the size of the pusher block by adding variously sized spacer blocks. Although, the preferred embodiments of the invention have been described, various modifications come to mind without departing from the spirit of the invention.

The dividers and the product tracks, for instance, could assume any configuration as long as they are still slidably and stably positioned into the races at the front and back of the display rack. The attachment at the front and the back allows for

greater stability of the products and the display rack. The display rack could also be made in a variety of sizes to accommodate much larger products.

5 Although the present invention has been described in terms of a certain embodiment, other embodiments apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art also are within the scope of this invention. Thus, various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For instance, various components may be repositioned as desired. Also, some of the components may be formed in the leash housing itself, such as the bag carrier, and bosses may be formed in the housing for rings and the like. Moreover, not all of the features, aspects and
10 advantages are necessarily required to practice the present invention. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention is intended to be defined only by the claims that follow.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A pusher block and track combination comprising a track with a pair of raised rails, each rail having two generally T-shaped ridges, the combination further comprising a pusher block with two sets of opposing flanges, wherein each set of said
5 two sets of opposing flanges attaches to one of said rails at more than the top and outside surface of said rail, whereby each said rail is captured between each corresponding set of opposing flanges.

2. The pusher block and track combination of Claim 1, wherein each rail has a tie down surface to the inside of each ridge and said opposing flanges include a set
10 of inside flanges and a set of outside flanges, said inside flanges extend further below said pusher block than said outside flanges.

3. The pusher block and track combination of Claim 1 further comprising a spacer block which can be stably fitted onto said pusher block to increase the height and/or width to allow for use with taller or wider products.

4. The pusher block and track combination of Claim 2 wherein said inside
15 flanges are formed on a single member extending below said pusher block.

5. The pusher block and track combination of Claim 4 wherein said single member comprises at least one chamfer.

6. The pusher block and track combination of Claim 4 wherein said single
20 member comprises a top and bottom chamfer.

7. An adjustable display rack for storing and displaying products in a shelf-like orientation, said display rack comprising:

a frame having a front panel and a rear panel, said front panel and said rear panel being arranged generally parallel to each other and being separated by
25 a fixed distance from one another, said front panel and said rear panel including races to allow attachment of product tracks and dividers;

one or more product tracks having raised rails extending between said front panel and said rear panel and being positioned generally transverse to said front panel;

30 a removable pusher block being slidably attached to said product track;

a biasing member urging said pusher block forward; and

at least one divider being positioned between two adjacent product tracks, wherein said product tracks and dividers are slidably attached to said front and rear races and allow for horizontal movement of said product tracks and dividers.

5 8. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said product track and said divider are formed in a single piece.

 9. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said races extend the entire length of said front panel and said rear panel.

10 10. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said races are segmented.

 11. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said biasing member is attached to said pusher block and said product track.

 12. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said biasing member is attached to said pusher block and said frame.

15 13. The display rack of Claim 7, wherein said front panel is taller than said rear panel.

 14. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said front panel is transparent.

20 15. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said front panel is angled rearward toward said rear panel.

 16. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said frame further comprises at least one side panel that is attached to said front panel and said rear panel by a removable fastener.

25 17. The adjustable display rack of Claim 16, wherein said frame further comprises at least one side panel that is attached to said front panel and said rear panel by a permanent or semi-permanent fastener.

 18. The adjustable display rack of Claim 16, wherein said side panel is selected from the group consisting of: a product track, a divider, or a combined product track and divider.

19. The adjustable display rack of Claim 17, wherein said side panel is selected from the group consisting of: a product track, a divider, or a combined product track and divider.

20. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said product tracks further comprise clips that are slidable in the races.

21. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said product track comprises a pair of raised rails each having a generally T shape,

and wherein said pusher block includes at least two sets of opposing flanges, wherein each said set of opposing flanges capture an outside and inside edge of a corresponding one of said rails.

22. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said biasing member is a roll spring.

23. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said removable pusher block further comprises a spacer block which can be stably fitted onto said pusher block to increase the height and/or width for taller or wider products.

24. The adjustable display rack of Claim 23, wherein said spacer block can optionally be used to secure said track into position, and stably increase or decrease the separation of said tracks or tracks and dividers to accommodate merchandise of different widths.

25. The adjustable display rack of Claim 23, wherein said spacer block is positioned on the rails whereby said pusher block is spaced apart from said front panel when in a forwardmost position.

26. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said divider has an upside-down T-shape or L-shape in cross-section.

27. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said adjustable display rack is formed of a lubricious material.

28. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said adjustable display rack is coated with silicone.

29. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7, wherein said product tracks are secured into position by falling into a series of grooves within said races on said front panel and said rear panel.

30. The adjustable display rack of Claim 7 further comprising a stopping member holding said pusher block at a distance from said front panel.

31. The adjustable display rack of Claim 30 wherein said stopping member is adjacent said front panel.

5 32. The adjustable display rack of Claim 31 wherein said stopping member is a screw or a rivet.

33. An adjustable display rack for storing and displaying products in a shelf-like orientation, said display rack comprising:

10 a frame having a front panel and a rear panel arranged generally parallel to each other and being a fixed distance apart from one another, said front panel and said rear panel each having a race extending along its length;

one or more product tracks generally having collinear raised rails extending generally transverse to said front panel and said rear panels, said rails having a generally T-shape cross-sections;

15 a removable pusher block slidably attached to said product track;

said pusher block having at least two sets of opposing flanges, each said set of opposing flanges attach to one of said rails at more than the top and outside surface of said rail, said rail being secured between said set of opposing flanges;

20 a biasing member urging said pusher block forward; and

a pusher block and track combination comprising a track with a pair of raised rails, each rail having two generally T-shaped ridges, the combination further comprising a pusher block with two sets of opposing flanges, wherein each set of said two sets of opposing flanges attaches to one of said rails at more than the top and outside surface of said rail, whereby each said rail is captured between each corresponding set of opposing flanges.

25 34. A display rack for storing and displaying products, comprising:

30 1) a track to underlie a plurality of said products, said track extending longitudinally between a first end and a second end, said track comprising a first side and a second side;

2) a product pusher which reciprocates along the longitude of said track;

3) a spring biasing said product pusher toward said first end of said track; and

4) a sliding connection between said track and said product pusher, said sliding connection comprising:

5 a) a first pair of surfaces and a second pair of surfaces, said first pair of surfaces located adjacent said first side of said track and said second pair located adjacent said second side of said track, one surface of each of said first pair of surfaces and said second pair of surfaces being on said track and the other surface of each of said first and second pairs being on said product pusher, said
10 first and second pairs of surfaces engaging to resist separation of said product pusher from said track, and

b) a third pair of surfaces, located between said first side of said track and said second side of said track, one surface of said third pair being on said track and the other surface of said third pair being on said product pusher,
15 said third pair of surfaces engaging to resist separation of said product pusher from said track.

35. The display rack of Claim 34 further comprising a fourth pair of surfaces, formed separate of said third pair of surfaces, located between said first side of said track and said second side of said track, one surface of said fourth pair being on said track and the other surface of said fourth pair being on said product pusher, said
20 fourth pair of surfaces engaging to resist separation of said product pusher from said track.

36. A display rack for storing and displaying products, comprising:

25 1) at least three tracks, each configured to underlie a different one of at least three parallel rows of said products, each of said three tracks extending longitudinally between first and second ends;

2) at least three product pushers, each of which reciprocates along the longitude of one of said three tracks;

30 3) at least three springs, each of which biases one of said three parallel rows of said products toward said first end of one of said three tracks; and

4) first and second guides, said first guide lying transverse to the longitudinal extensions of each of said three tracks and slidably engaging each of said three tracks adjacent to said first end of each of said three tracks, said second guide lying transverse to the longitudinal extensions of each of said three tracks and slidably engaging said second end of each of said three tracks, whereby said three tracks are capable of transverse movement along said first and second guides.

37. A method of displaying products, comprising:

placing products in at least three parallel rows on product tracks;

pushing each of said three parallel rows along said product tracks in a direction toward a vending position; and

adjusting each of said product tracks laterally to accommodate the size of said products, while slidably capturing both ends of said product tracks and guiding both ends of each of said product tracks to maintain said product tracks parallel to one another during said adjusting.

ADJUSTABLE FORWARD FEEDING DISPLAY SYSTEM

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An adjustable display rack is used in a shelf management system. The rack stores and displays products of a variety of shapes and sizes and automatically delivers the products to the front of the rack. The adjustable display rack includes a frame and a product supporting and feeding assembly. The assembly includes product tracks that can be added or removed as needed and that can be separated by varying distances depending on the width desired. The assembly also includes dividers. The product tracks and dividers can be separate or integral. The product tracks have raised rails extending from a front of the track to a back of the rack for attachment of a removable pusher block and a roll spring which urges the pusher block forward. Additionally, a spacer block can be fitted onto the pusher block to increase its height and width or used to change the spacing between the tracks. The tracks are generally freely slidable in races formed within the frame.

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081799
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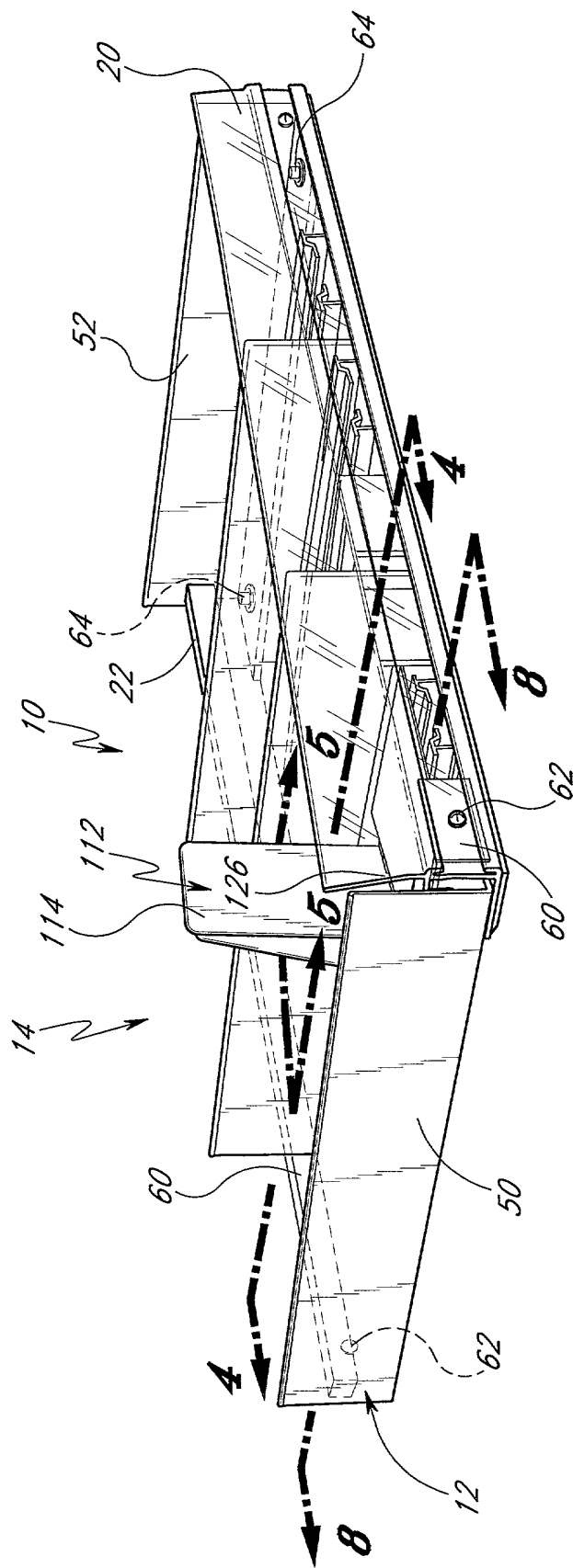


FIG. 1

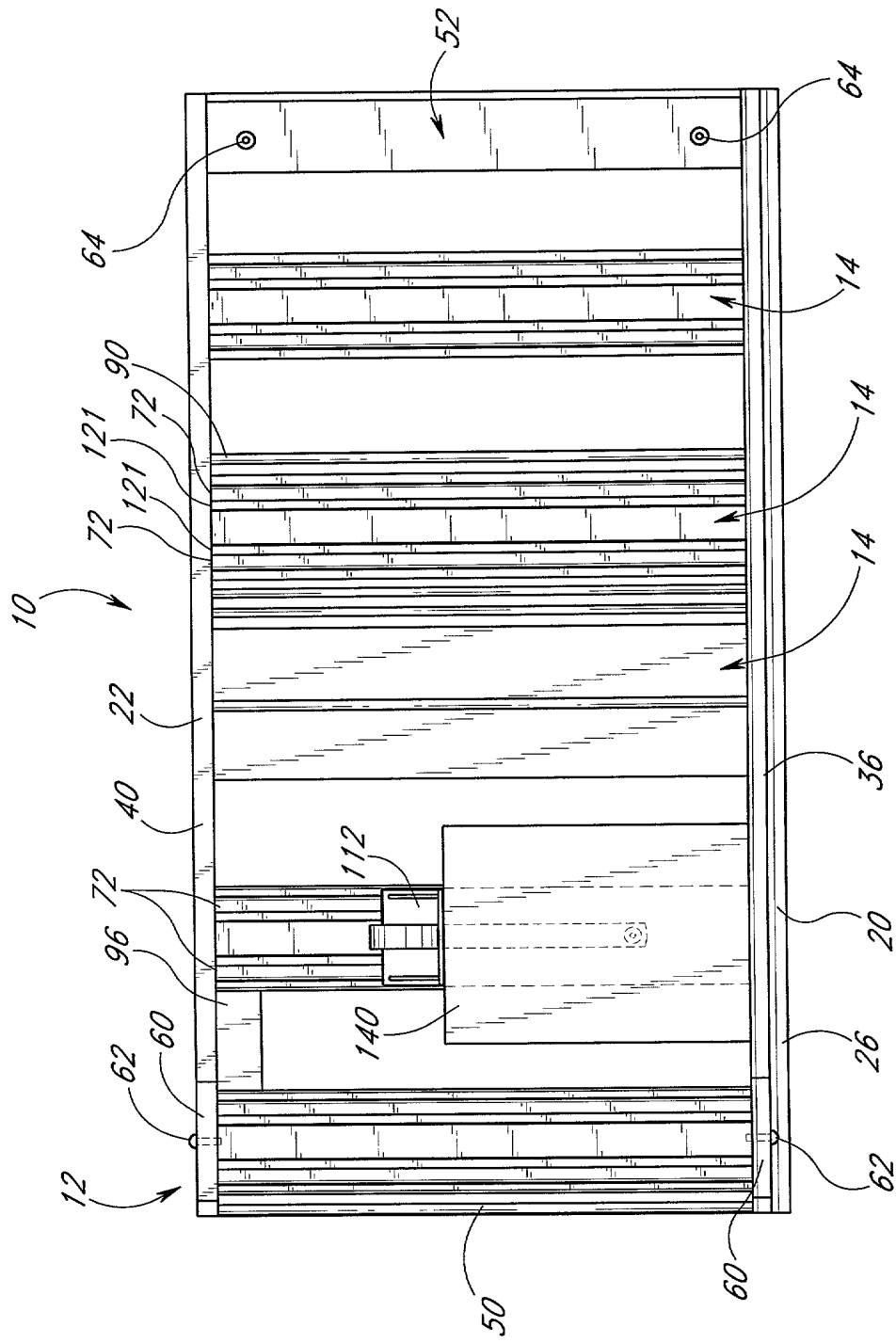


FIG. 3

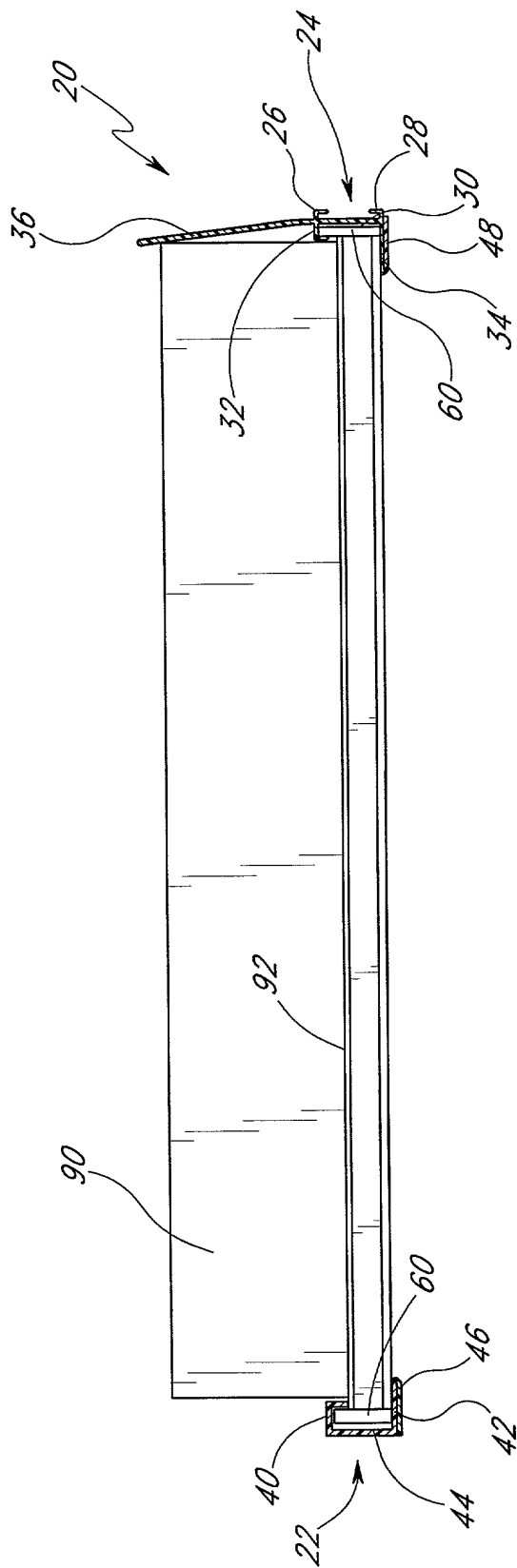


FIG. 4

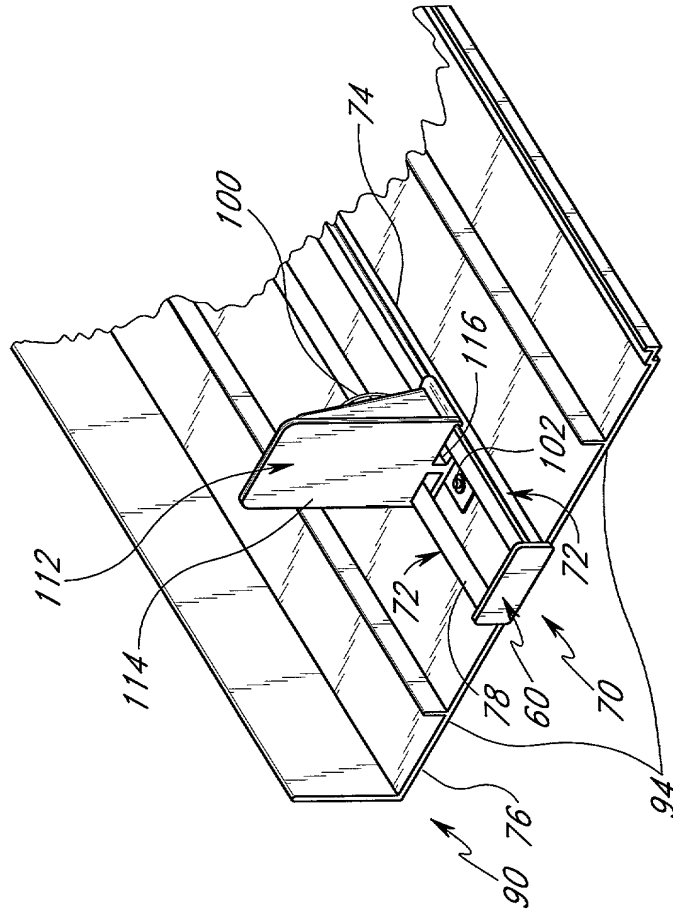


FIG. 5

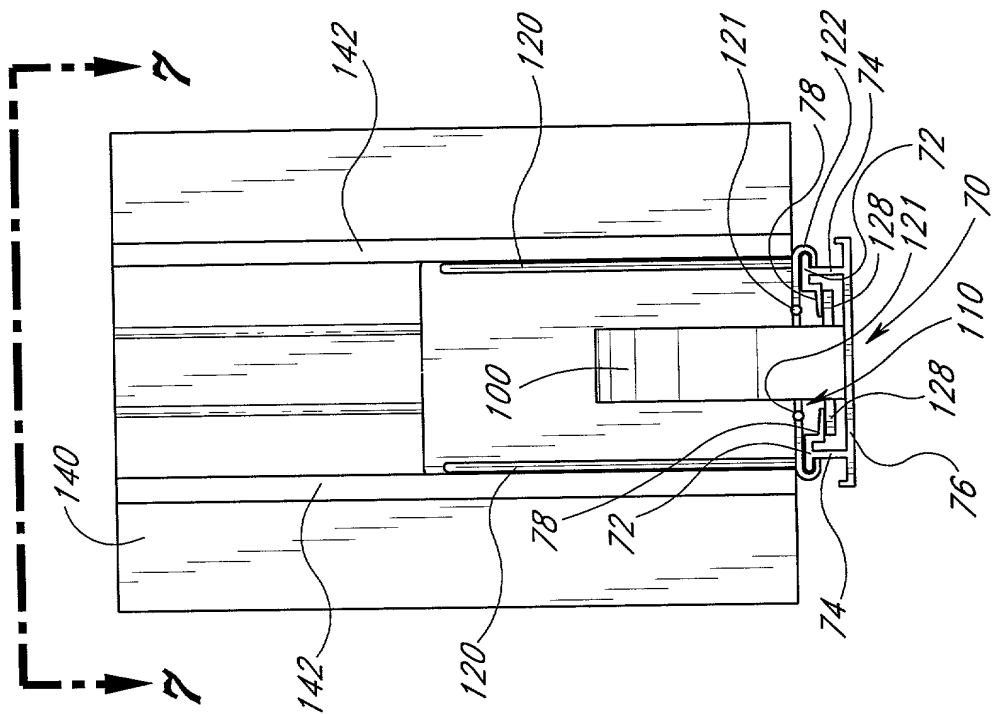


FIG. 6

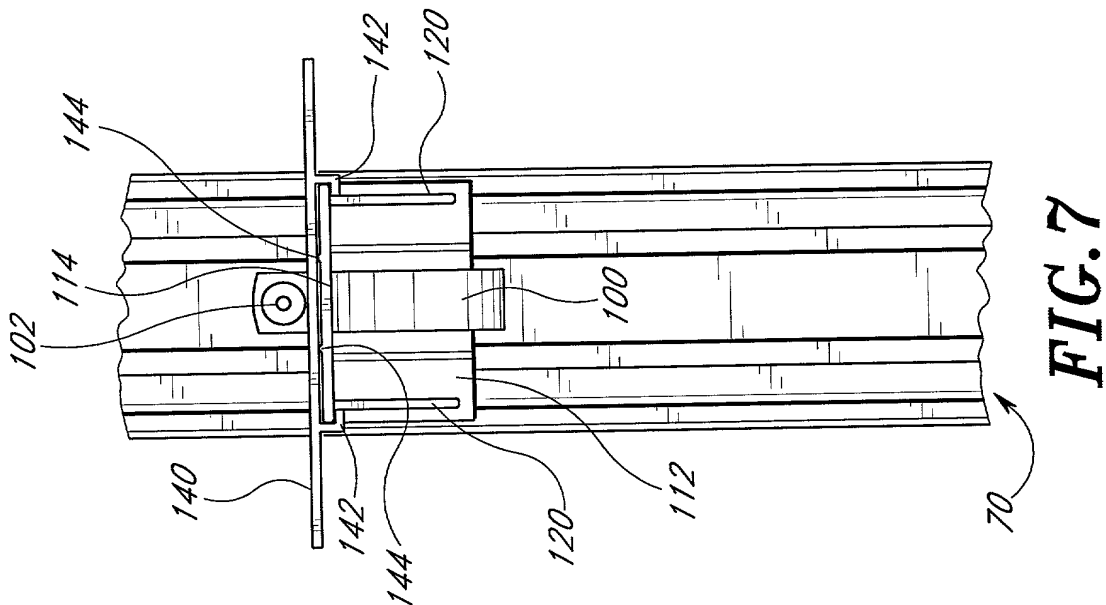


FIG. 7

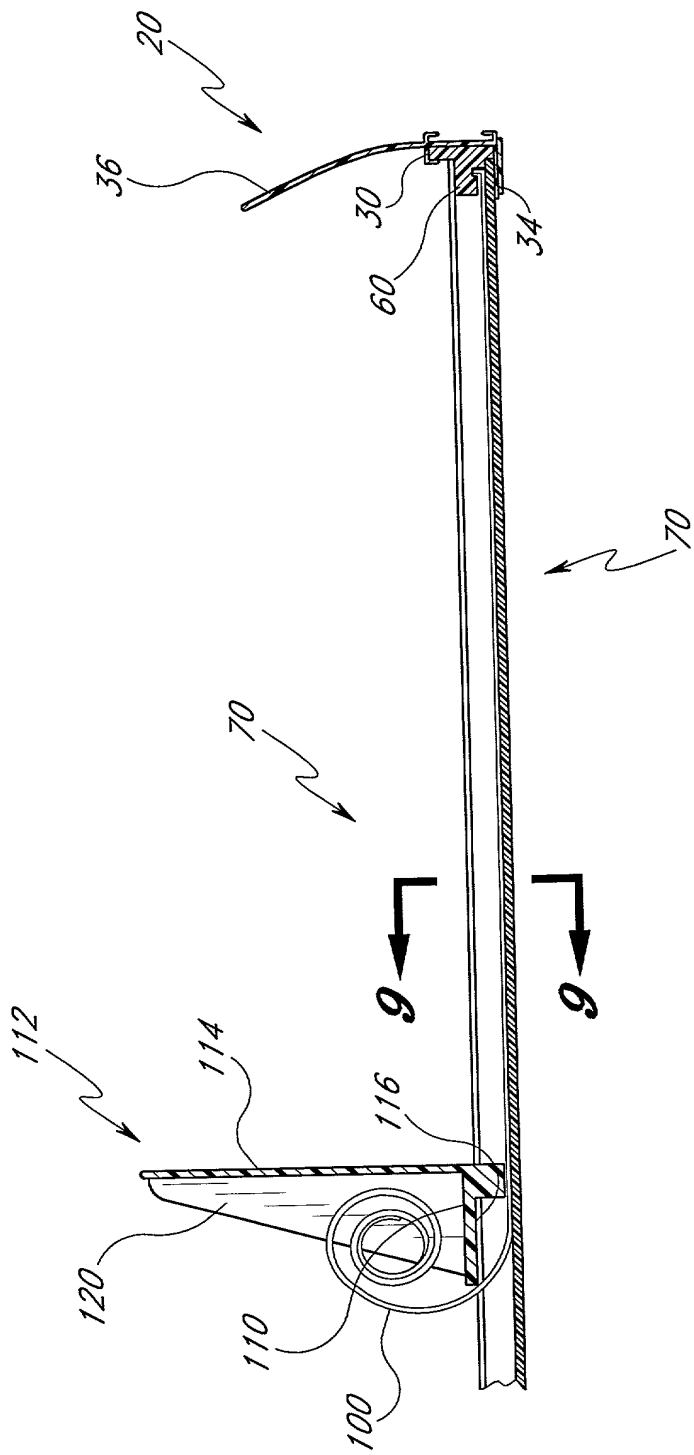


FIG. 8

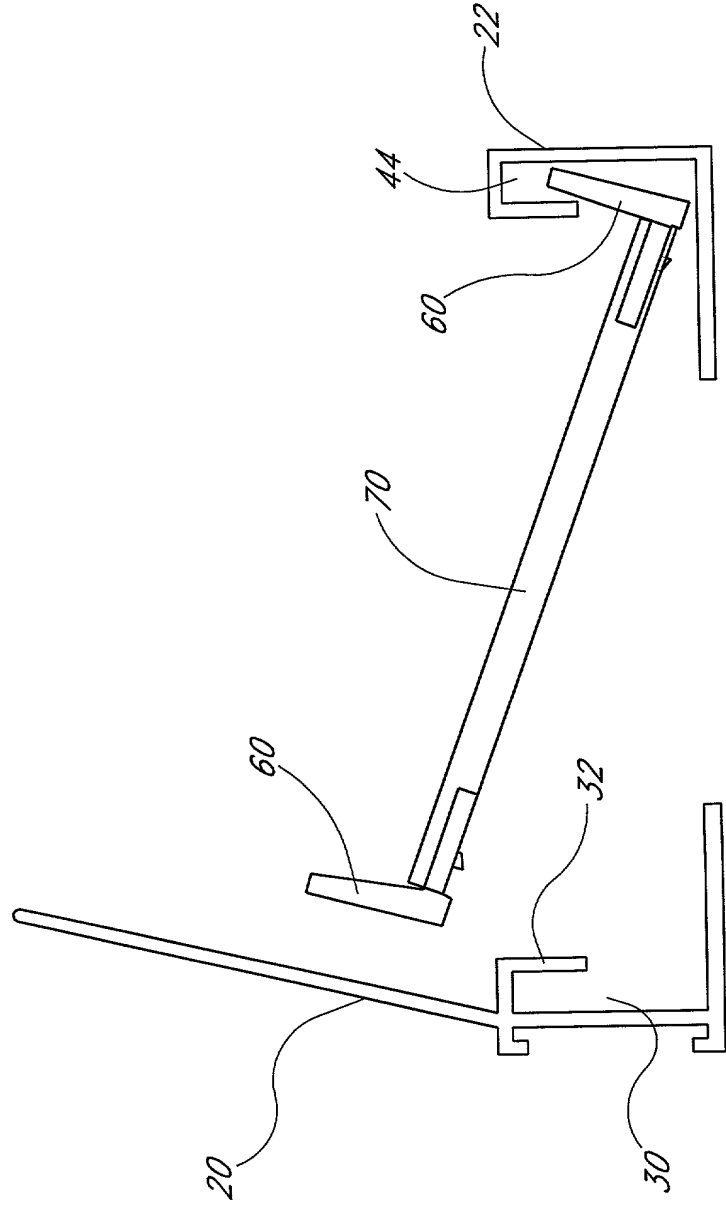


FIG. 10